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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of accountability on teacher learning and the capacity of districts and schools to support instructional practices that bolster student performance, examining: state policy regarding incentives, sanctions, rewards, recognition, and assessment required for high stakes accountability, and professional development of educators and organizational capacity of schools; the status of professional and organizational development activities and how teachers, principals, and district leaders responded in light of state accountability; and intended and unintended consequences of high stakes accountability on professional development. Analysis of data from policy inventories, school case studies, and teacher surveys indicated that accountability models varied considerably. Teachers described their most positive learning experiences in ways that aligned with notions of high quality professional development, though they did not feel connected to wider school performance issues. District and school organizational capacity to support teacher learning depended on several factors (e.g., type and quality of support available from the state). Accountability pressures focused teacher learning opportunities on the tested subjects. There was increased attention to analysis of test results. Variation in state accountability systems provided different incentives for teachers to respond as reform agents. School districts and schools, as organizational units, mediated the responses of teachers, and therefore, the ultimate effect on student learning. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

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The Impact of Accountability on the Professional Development of Teachers: Preliminary Evidence from Case Studies in Six Southern States

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This paper presents preliminary findings from a cross-state study, *The Impact of High-Stakes Accountability on Professional Development: Evidence from the South.* The project represents collaboration between the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (SECTQ) of the University of North Carolina and the Applied Research Center of Georgia State University, with sponsorship from the Spencer Foundation. The project is intended to deepen understanding of the influence of accountability on teacher learning and the capacity of districts and schools to support instructional practices that bolster student performance. We hope to further knowledge development and use among policy makers, practitioners, and researchers in the region.

After the launch of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the South clearly jumped ahead of the nation in creating accountability systems built on statewide testing of basic skills and reporting. Now, the region has created a more comprehensive mix of varied accountability models. Indeed, as reported in *Quality Counts 2000,* southern states have enacted policies that have some of the characteristics of high stakes accountability – but these policies vary greatly from state to state (Education Week, January 13, 2000). Standards-based reform poses new challenges for students and teachers alike. Educators have not been afforded the kinds of knowledge and skills needed to help their students meet these new standards; at the same time, the stakes for meeting those standards have increased significantly for both students and educators alike. These challenges are seen as more problematic in the South, where the availability of comparable state information on student performance through the National Assessment of Educational Progress has confirmed the concerns of most policy-makers. Frustrated with slow-moving progress on various student achievement indicators, low performance on national measures of educational performance, and the effectiveness of prior reforms, policy leaders throughout the Southeast have begun to call for raising and clarifying state standards through implementing accountability systems. These systems raise the stakes for educational performance with the hope of motivating better teaching and learning. A further challenge arises from the most recent trends in accountability, as observed by Elmore (2002): ideas about complex standards and performance assessments have increasingly given way to programs of standardized testing.

High stakes reforms are based on reconstructing incentives to get more of what policymakers want and expect out of public education. Their agents, those selected to respond to and carry out the incentives and increase educational performance, are teachers. While others

must also change behaviors and act in ways that enable teachers to make needed changes, teachers are the appointed agents and final arbiters of what gets taught and how.

Critical to determining how teachers respond to changes brought about by high stakes accountability is how their development as education professionals is shaped and molded to meet the incentives presented by the system. Thus, no matter how well coordinated a high stakes accountability system is, systems differ in ways that present a variety of objectives and incentives to the teachers who are charged with carrying them out. Sanctions and incentives for teachers, other educators, and students — based on standardized student test results — are being changed in state after state in an effort to improve student performance and ultimately to increase the supply of educated workers in the region. These cases focus on how teachers, schools, and districts in the Southeast respond within various state policy configurations.

This paper intends to provide the project's preliminary answers to three overarching research questions:

1. What is the policy environment in each southeastern state with respect to incentives, sanctions, rewards, recognition, and assessments required for high stakes accountability as well as professional development of educators and organizational capacity of schools and districts?

2. What is the status of professional and organizational development activities in selected states and how do teachers, principals, and district leaders respond in light of state accountability?

3. What mix of intended and unintended consequences does high stakes accountability have on professional development and how does an organization's capacity play a role in these consequences?

Taken together, these questions and research strategies can form the basis for judging the intended consequences of high stakes accountability on professional development, the kind of organizational capacity necessary to achieve reform goals, and the underlying mechanisms at play.

METHODOLOGY

The project consists of three inter-related research strategies: six policy inventories, 24-school case studies, and an extensive teacher survey.

The policy inventories examined existing sources on accountability and professional development, as well as the work by Consortium for Policy Research in Education, the Education Commission of the States, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the Southern Regional Education Board. For the states of the Southeast region, researchers reviewed existing statutes and policy documents, interviewed key informants, gathered extant data on the resources and structures supporting accountability and testing as well as professional development in each state, and verified the elements of the policy environment. Each state was categorized using decision rules for each element of the accountability system, with specific attention to types of tests used, how ratings are developed, the kinds of sanctions and incentives employed, and how information is used. States with "High Stakes Accountability" in 1999-2000, defined as a combination of state policy incentives, sanctions, rewards, recognition, and assessments, are Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

In early 2001, the Center researchers met with peers from the Applied Research Center to discuss the selection of states and schools/districts for the sample. From the reviews of the policy environments in each state, the six states were selected to maximize the differences in the extent to which rewards, sanctions, and interventions associated with high stakes accountability have been implemented. Careful attention was paid to the timing of state reforms in order to establish when effects may be expected to register. Districts were chosen to represent the most difference, under the assumption that this would help to understand the district effect (the context of the school site cases). Districts had low and adequately performing schools, without any high performing schools, or they had high and adequately performing schools, but no low performing schools. Through the summer, the Applied Research Center chose districts for the case studies according to student performance categories and provided backups for those that declined to participate to the Southeast Center.

In August 2001, the Southeast Center convened the participating case study researchers from the Center, Mississippi State University, and University of Kentucky, along with the survey

team from the Applied Research Center for a three-day planning meeting in Chapel Hill. The team developed a conceptual framework for the case study research questions and data collection, protocols for teacher and administrator interviews, and a timeline for the specific activities of the case studies.

Districts and schools were contacted for site visits. Researchers visited districts for 3-5 days each over the fall, interviewing teachers grades 2-4, with at least a year's experience at the site, school administrators in each of the two sample schools, and district administrators. Interviews were each written up in 2-5 page analytic summaries and documents were catalogued. Matrices were created to inform the survey, categorically comparing states with and without recognition or "labeling" for performance according to accountability approaches, teacher learning opportunities, organizational capacity, and consequentiality, or linkages among these factors. The unit of analysis for each case is the school, making the assumption that there will be a district effect. These categories provide the structure for this paper.

In February 2002, the case study researchers were brought to Atlanta for a three-day meeting by the Applied Research Center, to discuss preliminary findings and to discuss how they could inform and be supported by the survey in the spring. These findings, in combination with instruments used in other related studies and modeling of SASS professional development data, structured the development and administration of a cross-state survey. This survey will begin to address the mix of intended and unintended consequences high stakes accountability have on professional development and organizational capacity.

ACCOUNTABILITY APPROACHES

Research on efforts to stimulate performance improvements clearly points out that the critical factor is *how the schools and teachers respond to changes in the incentives* as well as opportunities for capacity building that are presented to them (Murnane and Levy 1996; Ginsberg and Berry, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997). School districts and schools are organizational units that are expected to mediate the responses of teachers and, therefore, the ultimate effect on student learning.

Many of the past and current school accountability systems appear to build upon several assumptions — students, teachers, and principals will work harder and achieve more when goals

are clear, performance information is available and publicized, and "carrots and sticks" are created for motivation. According to Newman, King, and Rigdon (1997), a school accountability system should include four components, including information about an organization's performance (test scores, graduation rates), standards for assessing the organization's performance, consequences for success or failure (rewards and sanctions), and an agency that collects information, judges whether or not standards have been met, and distributes rewards and sanctions.

Accountability models vary considerably in terms of how data are collected, scored, and reported. Despite the fact that some states (e.g., several in the Southeast including South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee) use more sophisticated hierarchical linear regression models to gauge student achievement gains, these advancements do not resolve the questions about what data the model should use. Linn (2000) notes that states may use a range of data based on any number of models, including comparisons of cross-sectional cohorts of students at different grade levels in the same year, or comparisons of cross-sectional cohorts in a fixed grade from year to the next longitudinal comparisons of school aggregate scores without requiring matched individual data, or longitudinal comparisons based only on matched student records. Each could have implications on what counts as schools organize instruction and professional development.

In our inquiry into state and local accountability systems, we focused on assessment systems, positive and negative incentives, and reporting or recognitions. The case studies appear to reveal some interesting understandings of the assessments (the tests themselves) and the public reporting of school-level performance. While all six states use a criterion-referenced state test designed to measure state learning standards, they vary in the grades and subjects tested and in the proportion of multiple-choice versus open-response. Although all states have standards for other subjects, they all test at least reading and math skills. Several states supplemented state tests with the nationally-normed Terra Nova, both to benchmark against an external standard and to obtain more detailed information on student skills.

All of the states publicly report test results by school, and this is a source of tension for all but the schools which have done very well. While not all states label schools by performance categories, all six seem to be moving toward a public report of both absolute scores and performance improvement from year to year for each school and district. We found much

confusion among educators in the schools and districts as to how these ratings are figured, with many claiming that even knowing a school's raw scores would not allow them to predict their school's status. One rural superintendent went so far as to call the state growth formula "voo doo statistics." Small schools also experienced extreme annual variance in the scores, depending on cohort size and skill level, making the test result information difficult to apply to future instruction and to track strategically.

Across the states, we found teachers and administrators knowing and caring more or less about the incentives or rewards of the accountability system, depending on whether or not their own schools were subject to them. Schools that received rewards due to test scores were proud, although they were also often not sure how they achieved their status and concerned about maintaining their reputations. Schools that were sanctioned, usually in the form of a low performing label from their states, tended to have a mission for improvement, although their plans varied as far as how to get to the next level. There was some confusion in general about which schools qualified for rewards and sanctions according to state policy, especially in states where the accountability systems are only now developing, such as Georgia and South Carolina. In those states especially, teachers generally feared for the worst, such as reporting that principals and teachers in low-scoring schools might be fired—an expectation not shared by their district officials. At the same time, educators in the states with longer-standing systems, such as Kentucky and North Carolina, were more sanguine about the process and somewhat more articulate on the subject of positive and negative consequences and how they are assigned.

Early discussion across the case study teams suggests that in order to understand the impact of incentives (including sanctions and rewards), one useful focus is on the ways teachers and administrators discuss the public consequences of accountability, particularly in terms of reporting or recognitions. A recurrent phrase heard by the case teams was "paying attention" to student achievement in a new way. This was a description of the consequence of increased testing of students and scrutiny of schools, teachers, and students. Parents and the press were also described as "paying attention" in new ways. There may also be evidence of teachers and administrators articulating a new more public obligation to justify their activities.

Even so, while some teachers reported more community involvement in understanding the teaching and learning in their schools, many described a situation in which parents are still only able to engage in a crisis conversation *about their own child's retention*. Teachers complain

that parents are not willing to take responsibility and, according to teachers, parents don't yet seem to grasp the new expectations and consequences of accountability in their children's schools across our sites. In most cases, teachers and administrators from our sample schools did not report any significant concern or accolades from their own communities as a result of their state test scores or recognitions. Schools that tested well seemed to be fulfilling expectations, while schools that fared less well reported that the faculty and community understood that tests cannot be the full measure of the school, and did not withdraw support.

There are also case indications of how the local context of schools and districts results in different interpretations of state accountability approaches, and these likely mediate the impact of state policies. For instance, there is the factor of the history of schools and their communities, including segregation, the ebb and flow of local economies, demographic changes, politics, consolidations and mergers. There are conservative community cultures with views of accountability and standards that would privilege local control. Also clearly influencing the local context is the extent to which the district or school draws on, or contributes to, community resources. For instance, several cases are from rural counties where the schools are the biggest employer in their region, while other schools are perceived as on the geographically "poor side" of the district.

All of this leads up to the question of who is held responsible for student results. Many teachers we met seem to carry with them a sense of their school and communities as "haves" or "have-nots," whether within the district or in relationship to the rest of the state. They often seek to explain student performance with commentary about relative wealth, the educational level of parents, and other factors of the community. Every school seemed to struggle with the challenge to make continuous growth, some because there was so much left to do and some because students were already flying at the top of the state scale. All of this comes out especially in conversations about schools that are "working hard" versus "working smart," to make the growth mandated by state departments. At the bottom of the state achievement lists are schools populated by poor minority children, and the top is comprised of upper middle class white schools. Well-meaning and dedicated educators in the lower schools saw their socioeconomic setting as a barrier to achieving the standards; and although they saw the attention of the state as a positive step toward supporting their clients, they generally viewed the state accountability system as more of a stick than a carrot in their everyday working lives. Although have-not

students could not be brought up to standard immediately even with the strong arm of the state, these schools were determined to give them everything they could and draw on any resources the system would provide.

TEACHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The project hypothesized that the presence of high stakes accountability could improve the quality of professional development by focusing on student performance goals and changing the incentives to allocate teachers' time to high quality, targeted development activities. Teacher professional development, for this study, includes changes in practice and to what degree teachers take advantage of and make rational choices and decisions regarding professional development activities.

A recent large-scale study, utilizing surveys and case studies, surfaced six critical factors (underlined below) for creating effective professional development that is linked to the development of teacher knowledge and changes in teaching practices (Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet, 2000). The researchers concluded that:

> *Professional development should focus on deepening teachers' content knowledge and knowledge of how students learn particular content, on providing opportunities for active learning, and on encouraging coherence in teachers' professional development experiences. School and districts should pursue these goals by using activities that have greater duration and that involve collective participation. Although* reform *forms of professional development are more effective than* traditional *reforms, the advantages reform activities are explained primarily by greater duration of the activities* (Birman, et. al., 2000, p. 32).

In order to elicit a wide range of answers on the professional development experiences of teachers, the cases followed a two-part interview protocol strategy. First we obtained a profile of the teacher's typical day, using an activity matrix that focused on instructional practices. Then we moved to questions about the teacher's *learning opportunities*, with follow-up questions that asked the teacher to indicate where the impact of the experiences impacted their teaching day.

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The interview protocol included questions based on the study's conceptual framework (based upon a review of the literature), which outlined the dimensions of high quality teacher professional development probing for where these were characteristic of the kinds of learning opportunities teachers identified for us. Professional development quality is understood in terms of sources, characteristics (including pedagogy, feedback, and follow-up), engagement, and content. For the purpose of influencing the survey design, we were looking for a catalogue of experiences in the language that was "indigenous" to the school setting. However for the cases, we are also looking to understand the degree to which these teacher learning opportunities were professional development in the quality sense that we mean. Three themes have emerged from the analysis to date:

First, teachers in the cases are describing their most positive learning experiences in ways that align with our notions of high quality professional development. That is, we believe we can say that they "like" what we would think is good for them. This includes opportunities for both peer coaching and follow-up sessions from the staff developer, learning directly from the experts (as opposed to a train-the-trainer mode, unless the teacher was herself the trainer), and most importantly, a high value on classroom applicability and practicality. Expertise, however, has an instructing construct: there are some experts or consultants who are described as "real teachers," and teachers find especially credible those staff development providers who can speak of using (and succeeding) their ideas with students in real classrooms. One teacher in North Carolina praised a program's author who goes back to the classroom because "she knows what is really happening" in contrast to others who only gave examples of "idealized students."

It's worth noting that some teachers in the cases have no expectation or experience of what they would consider "learning opportunities." Whether from their own conception of their roles as teachers, or perhaps a school climate factor we have not yet named, not all teachers in the cases are able to articulate on-going goals for their own development. Instead, these teachers describe attending staff development sessions but not seeing any substantial connection to what they are doing, or who they are, as teachers. We have not completed the cross-case comparisons, but there does not appear to be a distinction between the low and high performing districts along this dimension; rather, such teachers seem to live in every district.

Second, we are interested in the idea of *coherence* as a mark of professional development quality. The cases offer good evidence of teachers and administrators working towards *alignment*

between curricula and testing and whole-school *focus* on state expectations. However, we do not know whether it is important that a principal's rationale for a school's efforts to meet accountability demands needs to be echoed (or even parroted) by teachers. The question is whether it matters if the teachers can articulate their knowledge of why they are doing what they are doing in terms of a whole school or whole district plan. In both high and low performing districts, we found some teachers to have a strong sense of the work they wanted to accomplish in their classrooms with their children, and a reasonable understanding of the skills and knowledge required by a particular grade level test, but no expressed interest in or connection to any wider school performance issues.

The cases profile districts and schools that achieve at roughly similar levels but offer or mandate quite different teacher development opportunities aimed at improving student achievement. Some define teacher skills narrowly and focus on test-taking preparation, some are oriented toward making state standards more salient in classrooms, some process achievement data with or for teachers in order to better understand student progress. We hope to offer further illustrations of the differences between controlled, as opposed to flexible, teacher development. There are some complicated balances maintained between teacher autonomy and what a given administrator believes is best for grade level, department, or school coherence. Schools that are under more pressure from the state accountability system, due to state labeling or poor performance, seem to have a more controlling approach to teachers' professional development. In Tennessee, teachers in a high-performing school praised the variety and frequency of teacher learning opportunities offered in their district, while teachers in an adequately performing school commented on the loss of choice in staff development at the school level, and stated that they had lost some freedom in choosing among opportunities.

A further dimension of coherence or alignment between accountability requirements and teacher learning opportunities arises from the degree to which professional development is considered an answer to a particular problem. In low-performing schools, there can be a decision to focus all resources on reading, for instance, and choices may well be driven by not only what is expected by a given state test, but also by external teams brought in with the intention of improving the school. Such teams may have their own specific agendas for what teachers need to learn. In high performing schools, in contrast, there may be a perception of "no problems" that leads to stagnation in teacher practices. In the cases of adequately performing schools, the

professional learning climate seems more dependent on the school leadership and a perception of how well the students should be doing.

A third area emerging for analysis is teacher collaboration. The cases indicate a variety of ways that schools intentionally bring teachers together to work. This ranges from structured test analysis and curriculum development time organized by grade levels to more traditional shared planning time where teachers may choose to cooperate or align lessons. We believe we have heard much more emphasis on teachers working together to understand what is expected of their students, as well as to brainstorm and plan what they can do collaboratively to help students meet these demands. Some schools appear more able to promote a faculty culture, including a shared philosophy and vision for the school, productive working relationships, and good channels of communication. Testing systems appear to be giving new dimensions and purposes to grade-level planning, perhaps making such collaboration a more clear opportunity for teacher learning. Teachers in many southeastern states are working together to map the curriculum to the state tests, to implement new programs and utilize new materials, and to develop instructional strategies aimed at improving student achievement.

It is clear that these cases will offer rich descriptions of where professional development is offered in order to help teachers develop curriculum and instruction that addresses changing student populations and new kinds of learning needs. Test content is driving the content of teacher learning opportunities, especially in low performing schools. The degree to which the school and district rationales make sense (or the choices they make in what to offer are likely to bring the intended results) can be understood in the wider context of important findings from the cases on organizational capacity.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY:

It has been recognized for some time that local capacity is essential to the implementation of educational reform (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Elmore & McLaughlin; McLaughlin, 1987). It is also recognized that, as local change processes have become more complex in current times, they are even more dependent on local capacity than were past reform initiatives (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1994). As stated earlier, research on efforts to increase performance of schools illustrates that the critical factor is *how the schools and teachers respond to changes in*

the incentives as well as opportunities for capacity building that are presented to them (Murnane and Levy 1996; Ginsberg and Berry, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Newman, King, and Rigdon (1997) found that schools that had strong internal accountability systems, including the means for staff to identify standards for student performance, collect data to measure their progress, and use peer review to drive goal attainment, were more likely to increase their organizational capacity. They found that internal accountability accounted for a "major source of cohesion" with the schools — and thus could be viewed as both a "building block" for and a "product" of high organizational capacity (p. 48).

Although one would assume that organizational capacity is endemic to the internal workings of schools and districts, external agents can help build it through new and strategic technical resources, professional development, and incentives that strengthen school autonomy (Newman and Wehlage, 1995). Clearly, the interaction between the incentives presented through state policies and local culture, goals, policies, and priorities are extremely influential in determining how schools will respond to high stakes accountability (Elmore 1997; Cohen 1996).

In the preliminary findings of these cases, the organizational capacity of districts and schools to support teacher learning appears to be dependent on several factors. First, the type and quality of support available from the state may affect a school and district's capacity. Second, the skill level, resourcefulness, and knowledgeability of the district administrative staff appears to affect the quantity and quality of teacher learning opportunities. Third, the access to financial resources directly impacts the access of teachers to learning opportunities. Finally, the integration of the schools within the surrounding community seems to be a key factor—specifically, where there is a sense of ownership of the schools by the members of the surrounding community.

State and local district support to schools and teachers for meeting achievement goals varied across the states. While it seems that most of the responsibility falls to the districts to guide struggling schools and support individual students to meet goals, there are state structures in place in some states. The states with more established accountability systems regularly send individuals or teams to struggling schools to support improvement planning. These supports are considered both a blessing and a curse by schools, where educators feel stigmatized by the public declaration that the state has come to fix the school from without. Quality of support also tends to vary, depending largely on attitudes of the giver and the recipient toward turning a school

around. As we will also discuss in terms of linkages between accountability, instruction, and teacher learning, the judgment that a school is not doing its job in terms of student learning affects both how the faculty views itself and how others see the school. Some educators were even worried that the state's budget would not allow for support for failing schools, rendering the labels merely punitive.

There is a sense that the skill level and knowledgeability of the chief administrator affects the overall organizational capacity of a school district, regardless of the size or the level of achievement of the students. Districts with greater organizational capacity appeared to have a clearer, better-articulated vision and statement of purpose for their district and a clearer understanding of the expectations of the state's department of education. Highly skilled administrators and/or supervisors spoke in terms of proactivity with regard to state expectations and mandates for student achievement and improvement. Districts with less organizational capacity could be described as being reactive rather than proactive to state expectations and mandates. This is particularly noticeable with regard to teacher learning opportunities, with a heavy reliance on "quick fixes" to improvements in test scores. These "quick fixes" take the form of pre-packaged programs and test prep materials or the employment of consultants to train teachers to teach test taking strategies to students.

Proactive administrators describe themselves as having been involved in test data analysis prior to the state's emphasis on test scores and student achievement. While many district superintendents used the popular terminology of data driven curricular decisions, superintendents in districts with a higher level of organizational capacity could document their proactive stance toward test data and were in the process of training teachers to become more skilled at analyzing student test data – hiring district personnel to oversee the process of disaggregating student data and/or bringing in consultants to facilitate the test score analysis process with teachers. In some school districts this system for test data analysis had lead to a more sophisticated approach toward identifying students with particular academic needs, more prescriptive teaching, and collaboration between teachers in different grade groups. Teachers and administrators reported, to varying degrees, a greater capacity for establishing early identification and intervention programs for at-risk students. These districts also tend to be more attune to curricular issues, attempting to "stay one step ahead" of the state in aligning their district's curriculums with the state's curriculum, as well as with the state testing system. An

indirect consequence of this alignment with state curriculum is the trend toward uniformity in teacher practice within the district. While some teachers felt this uniformity was welcome – ensuring that they were "on target" with district expectation, others reported this by-product as a negative aspect of the state's accountability system, sensing a loss of autonomy in decision-making ability within their classrooms. This seemed to result in a loss of collegiality among teachers, as their teaching methods became more mandated in order to ensure intra-district uniformity.

Highly skilled administrators demonstrated a *higher level of resourcefulness* in developing greater levels of capacity for their districts as well. They developed networking systems within the state departments of education, the surrounding institutes of higher education (both private and public), and the business communities. They actively sought financial support for the schools to accommodate professional development activities. Whether using federal Title funds, state grants, or private donations, highly skilled administrators tended to take an expansive role in securing financial resources for the schools and teachers in their districts. Resourceful, proactive administrators tended to discuss state accountability systems using positive terms and discussed their successful implementation of its components ahead of schedule. One chief administrator published an annual report that outlined every component of the accountability system, the name and job description of each district employee overseeing that component, and the results of their efforts during the previous year. Another district superintendent hosted a community wide meeting in which teachers, administrators, and parents could discuss the accountability system with their state legislators. Therefore, for these highly skilled administrators, the accountability system has enhanced their clout in the community.

While greater financial capacity within a district does not ensure greater student achievement, a deficit in financial capacity does negatively impact organizational capacity in several ways. Ironically, while there is more discussion regarding test scores and the need for improvement in student achievement, there is less understanding about how to analyze test data in districts with less financial capacity. As a matter of fact, not only is there less understanding about what to do with the test data, there tends to be a sense of futility in attempting to use the data effectively. On the other hand, in higher achieving schools there tends to be a lack of buy-in to the need to do anything with the test data or make any changes in teacher practice (an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" attitude).

Teachers in districts that lack financial capacity lose access to learning opportunities and may experience district environments where development activities are narrowly defined. When a district focus becomes more myopic with regard to long-term planning, seeking only the quick-fix for improving test scores, there are limited or no choices offered teachers in learning opportunities. Teachers make decisions about learning opportunities based on what will enable them to increase their salary levels – taking classes for higher degrees and certification or earning national board certification. The ability to do this is challenging for teachers in rural districts. Teachers in districts with a lower level of financial capacity are forced, at times, to seek only learning opportunities that they can personally afford to attend. There is a clear understanding within these districts that there is little or no funding available for activities other than those approved by the district (generally those designed to improve test scores) or those offered at no cost by textbook manufacturers and teacher resource centers. Alternatively, districts with a higher degree of financial capacity facilitate and encourage teachers to participate in a wide variety of learning opportunities, both within the district and elsewhere at conferences and at the state department of education.

Because the education of children is a concern shared by all members of a community, regardless of socioeconomic status, schools can serve as a source of cohesiveness. Preliminary findings seem to suggest that a sense of community and ownership of the schools impact teacher learning in both direct and indirect ways. Communities in which the majority of students attend the public schools tend to provide more resources for teachers than communities in which many students attend private schools. This community "buy-in" to the public schools results in business partnerships, private grants, and both formal and informal involvement in the educational process. In addition, community leaders from all sectors of the county and/or city view themselves as stakeholders in the selection of the superintendent/director of the school system – whether through elections or the selection process. The outcome of a thoughtfully selected superintendent tends to greatly impact the opportunities teachers have to become better teachers.

There is evidence from case study findings across the southeastern United States that accountability systems have increased attention on the need for more community/parental involvement. Given that the NBPTS puts a high value on accomplished teachers working with parents and the community, there is an interesting dimension to teacher practice where teachers

and administrators are involved in explaining or communicating about the accountability systems in their schools (such as where there are retention/gateway processes involved in holding individual students accountable). Most schools reported hosting special parent nights and other communications about the standards and testing systems and how families could be involved.

Particularly in lower achieving schools, teachers and administrators tend to attribute lack of academic improvement to a lack of interest or involvement by parents in the educational process. Within districts with both adequate and lower achieving schools, or higher and adequate performing schools, the lower achieving schools tend to be working harder to improve parental involvement – to offer counseling services, academic materials for home use by parents, courses for caregivers, etc.

CONSEQUENTIALITY

Linkages between Accountability Approaches, Teacher Learning Opportunities, and Organizational Capacity

In data collection and preliminary analyses, we attended to intended and unintended consequences of accountability approaches on teacher learning opportunities and organizational capacity. As noted earlier, it appears that accountability pressures focus teacher learning opportunities on the tested subjects, and there is increased attention to analysis of test results.

Evidence from the case studies further suggest that accountability systems have provided some incentive for schools to push toward whole-school approaches to instruction in tested content areas. For instance, within many of the schools studied, there was a trend toward the adoption of school-wide literacy programs and preparations of teachers to implement the program. Several schools had adopted "four-block" models for literacy instruction with accompanying changes in school schedules and numbers of teachers in the classroom in order to implement the programs. In one South Carolina district, where science was due to be tested for the first time in the current year, there was focused attention on altering the curriculum in each grade level to reflect the state standards. In addition, a strategic approach to instruction was put

into place, with each grade level teacher becoming an expert in teaching one 6-week block to all students in that grade.

In several schools, learning opportunities were particularly oriented toward enhancing teachers' capacity to understand and meet the learning needs of their poorly performing students. Results of testing were used to make decisions about the focus of professional development in the coming year. Teachers were involved in analyzing test score data themselves, or receiving the disaggregated data in order to better target students' instructional needs. Teachers reported professional development activities that introduced varieties of methods to teach reading, writing, and mathematics to address a greater range of students' learning styles. Teachers also learned strategies to help students improve their test-taking skills.

As described earlier, researchers found strong trends in many of the case schools toward increased collaboration among teachers both within and across grade levels. Several schools had restructured the schedule to allow common grade-level planning time and encouraged or required their teachers to engage in team planning. Some schools dedicated weekly faculty meetings to specific cross-grade and within grade meetings. One district was implementing annual professional development on writing that brought together teacher representatives from every grade level at every school.

Linkages between Accountability Approaches and Organizational Capacity.

Data from the case studies indicated possible linkages between the accountability system and organizational capacity at the school and district levels, as well, including each of the following: (1) increased access to resources, (2) increased attention to parental involvement in the school, (3) increased staff turnover/changes in levels of commitment to students/schools, and (4) increased "clout" for hiring and firing personnel and leverage for implementing instructional goals.

The accountability systems in place in southeastern states attempt to provide, at different levels and with varying degrees of successes, means for "leveling the playing field" for lower performing schools. These efforts vary from state to state and from district to district. There is a tendency for lower achieving schools to receive increased fiscal and human resources from both the state and district. In one district, for example, funds and district office personnel were

deliberately directed to schools with greatest need based on student achievement. In other lower achieving schools, the state department of education had provided a consultant, generally a veteran educator, to oversee the staff development process. There is an expectation, both by the district administration, the school administration, and teachers, that with increased accountability by the state, there will be increased support for struggling schools. For example, a school that had just been labeled as low performing expected that resources – which in the past had been equally distributed regardless of disproportionate school sizes and students' needs – would have to be more equitably distributed. There is also evidence of frustration with state governments who are unable or unwilling to increase funding for schools and/or give teachers pay increases.

Teachers and administrators reported other types of increased resources, as well, including establishing early identification and intervention programs for at-risk students and increased access to and expertise available for understanding test data.

In a number of schools—particularly ones that were low performing—administrators and teachers attributed failure to attain expected achievement, in part, to lack of involvement of parents in their children's education. Staff at these schools were exploring and/or implementing strategies to encourage more parent involvement.

A common pattern in schools that were designated low performing was high rates of teacher and administrator turnover. Unfortunately, the turmoil caused by frequent loss of staff exacerbated these difficult situations. A diminished sense of collegiality was sensed at the school level as principals were held more accountable for the performance of students and the compliance of teachers to district mandates. This was particularly true in lower achieving schools. One principal in a lower achieving school discussed, as a source of pride, how he had been able to "let go of" four teachers during the previous school year. Another principal in a low performing school spoke of his ongoing efforts to "get rid of" teachers by "pencil whipping" them through his documentation process. Teachers in all but the higher achieving schools tended to speak in terms of being "stressed out," concerned about their job security and the status of education in general. One teacher in an adequate achieving school stated that she felt she was constantly being "checked rather than supported." On the positive side, however, solid leadership at the district and/or school level, could lead to hiring new staff with strong commitments to the success of all students and proven experience with improving student achievement.

Linkages Between Teacher Learning Opportunities, Classroom Instruction, and Student Learning

There were wide-ranging differences in the population of students served by the case study schools, and initial indications are that the extent of impact on classroom instruction and student learning were affected by differences in student populations. For example, in some cases, schools with high rates of poverty and transition among students who had faced these challenges for a number of years might be better prepared to take advantage of raised expectations and subsequent increases in resources. Teachers whose students have traditionally fared well in standardized testing were not prepared to respond as their populations changed and students with more diverse learning needs and challenging home environments entered their student population. Systems that served students who were high achievers on standardized tests and who anticipated no foreseeable change in population tended to be minimally affected by or concerned about the test.

It was also clear that the impact of the accountability system was in part determined by the content and format of the state test. The content areas tested (and not); the format of the items—e.g., open-ended vs multiple choice; and the extent of focus on higher-order thinking and problem-solving were all found to be influential factors on districts' and schools' responses to accountability, and therefore impacted on classroom instruction and student learning.

Linkages between Teacher Learning and Classroom Instruction

There was evidence from the cases that instructional decisions and changes in focus of professional development were leading to the following instructional trends: (1) changes in time and focus devoted to tested and not-tested content areas, (2) increased attention to enhancing test-taking skills of students, (3) increased variety in instructional approaches.

There is strong evidence that teachers were spending increased time on tested content areas and decreasing time devoted to non-tested content areas, and/or developing alternative strategies to include instruction in non-tested content. As noted earlier, schools were allotting more time in daily schedules to areas such as reading and writing. In addition, teachers routinely

reported that they were less likely to include learning activities that were not included in the standards/tested content.

This trend, of course, is affected by which subjects are included in the state test. Science and social studies were likely to get minimal attention in schools whose state did not include these areas on the test. If these areas were included in tests (or the teacher was especially dedicated to maintaining instruction in these areas) there was pressure to find ways to fit it all into the school schedule. Teachers spoke, for example, of working to integrate these content areas into reading and writing instruction.

Other changes in the focus of classroom activities were reported, as well. In some schools, for example, students' morning seatwork was focused on review of skills in mathematics and language arts. Several teachers lamented the need to eliminate "fun" activities, fieldtrips that they could not afford to include in instruction, or favorite topics that were not included in the course of study for their particular grade level.

A variety of strategies to enhance students' test-taking skills were reported. In some cases, the state or district provided benchmark tests throughout the school year that provided both information on students' performance and practice with taking tests in the format of the state test. Some teachers reported that they deliberately incorporated the "language of the test" in their own class instruction and student assignments. Teachers reported including direct instruction for students on how to take the standardized tests, and the use of practice tests—particularly as the testing date approached—were reported by a number of teachers.

There were indications that the nature of classroom instruction was, indeed, changing in schools where teachers had learned a variety of approaches to instruction. There were reports of increased use of small-group instruction—particularly in the area of language arts, and occasionally in mathematics, as well. Teachers reported incorporating hands-on strategies designed to address a greater variety of learning styles as a result of new strategies learned through professional development activities. Several of the schools had implemented computerized reading programs to encourage students to read more and to provide feedback to both students and teachers about their level of comprehension.

Linkages between Teacher Learning and Improved Student Learning.

Teachers were asked in interviews to describe any changes they had observed in student learning as a result of their own learning opportunities. Many of the teachers who had implemented changes in focus and teaching strategies reported impacts on their students' behavior, attitudes, and learning. Some teachers found, for example, that small group instruction was more appealing to students, and in some cases led to improved attitudes toward the content and classroom behavior. Teachers reported positive impacts on student learning as a result of including a greater variety of instructional strategies. A number of teachers commented that the strategies they were now using—for example, in the literacy programs—provided greater assurance that students did not "fall between the cracks".

Another indication of potential improvements in student learning that will warrant further study is the fact that some of the schools, identified as low performing based on the 99-00 test data had already shown improvement in scores when case site visits were conducted.

In this project the accountability system can be viewed as a trigger mechanism that influences teacher professional development and, subsequently, student learning. Preliminary findings from the cases suggest that variation in the way state accountability systems are set up provide different incentives for teachers to respond in their role as agents of reform. School districts and schools, as organizational units, mediate the responses of teachers and, therefore, the ultimate effect on student learning.

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